

# The Virgin Islands Consortium

## Domestic Violence And Sexual Assault Council Announces Healthy School Program

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The Virgin Islands Domestic Violence & Sexual Assault Council (DVSAC) has announced its partnership with the High Intensity Drug Trafficking Areas Program (HIDTA) to launch a territory-wide prevention education program for junior high school students entitled 'The Healthy School Initiative', a press release DVSAC issued late Wednesday has revealed.

The Healthy School Initiative will serve as a sub-component of DVSAC's 'Healthy Relationships Campaign' and will be a full semester pilot program at one participatory middle school on each island to: (1) collect qualitative and quantitative data on student alcohol and drug use, family violence existence and the correlation between both; (2) provide prevention education activities and training opportunities for parents, students

and teachers on healthy relationships, dating violence, drug and alcohol use and the relationship within; and (3) create awareness campaigns for the youth, by the youth to ensure that the message of 'healthy schools & health communities' remain existent even when the initiative has ended, according to the release.

All junior high public schools on St. Croix and St. Thomas/St. John were contacted to determine interest in the program. Of them, the Addelita Cancryn Junior High School in St. Thomas/St. John and the John H. Woodson Junior High School on this island expressed interest and support of the program and as such, the program was launched at both schools for the 2015 Domestic Violence Awareness Month.

As a result, DVSAC is providing Community Outreach Specialists - Ms. Jeanette John-Baptiste, Ms. Natalie Joseph and Ms. Darlene Springer – to each school for daily presence, workshops and activities for up to eight weeks to promote family violence and substance abuse prevention education. Students will have an opportunity to engage in character building exercises and workshops on topics to include but not limited to: conflict resolution, self-esteem, 'sexting' and social media, teen dating violence, marijuana and substance abuse, alcohol and date rape and many others.

The program, which is made possible through funding by HIDTA, will also provide for lunch and after-school extracurricular activities to reduce the risks of youth violence and drug/substance abuse - at no cost to the school. The Healthy School Initiative is a pilot program whose continuance is dependent on the success of the program which will be evaluated by a licensed psychologist and reviewed by the HIDTA Executive Board before the year's end.

The Virgin Islands Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Council is recognized as the territory's State Coalition by the Office of Violence Against Women and the Family Violence Prevention Services Act. The organization's aim, according to the release, to promote healthy relationships within the community by coordinating prevention education and awareness resources that advocate for the elimination of domestic violence, sexual assault, stalking and dating violence in the USVI territory. It promotes programs and activities whose purposes are to improve the response of the legal system, service providers, and the media to our issues as well as those that support and promote quality programs which empower victims and rehabilitate their aggressors.

The High Intensity Drug Trafficking Areas (HIDTA) program, created by Congress with the Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1988, provides assistance to Federal, state, local, and tribal law enforcement agencies operating in areas determined to be critical drug-trafficking regions of the United States. There are currently 35 HIDTA's, which include approximately 28 percent of all counties in the United States and a little over 70 percent of the U.S. population. HIDTA-designated counties are located in 49 states, as well as in Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin Islands, and the District of Columbia.

Today, prevention and treatment initiatives are an integral part of the HIDTA program. Currently, 22 regional HIDTA programs support prevention initiatives across the country, including the 5 SWB HIDTA regions. The HIDTA members work with community-based coalitions and adhere to evidence-based prevention practices, such as community mobilization and organizational change.

